

# Miller: I'm not going anywhere

President's power remains secure, fellow senators say

by Steven T. Dennis

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ANNAPOLIS — Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. says reports of his supposed disappearing act have been greatly exaggerated.

Every day Miller stays in office, he sets a record for longevity, a testament to his tremendous survival skills. But the FBI and the state prosecutor have continued to look into his role in a national campaign account that funneled hundreds of thousands of dollars from gambling interests to state lawmakers across the nation, while Miller's rival, House Speaker Michael E. Busch, has dominated the news with his flirtations with various slots plans.

Miller denies any unusual inactivity.

"This summer is like any other summer of my life," he said.

"I work very hard," said Miller (D-Dist. 27) of Chesapeake Beach, who has a law practice in Clinton. "The General Assembly sort of has a down time between May and August. September we start gearing up. It's been a very productive summer for me.

"I'm teaching myself computer skills, trying to catch up to my grandchildren," said Miller, who has 10 grandkids. "Anybody who calls me from *The Gazette*, *The Sun*, I am happy to return their calls."

Miller does not mention *The Washington Post*, whose reporting on his campaign fund-raising activities led to the legal inquiries.

"If I get punched, I'm going to punch back," he said.

Miller, after 17 years at the top, remains as feisty as ever in interviews, continuing to rip Busch (D-Dist. 30) of Annapolis for his dalliances with slot machines and the governor for his corporate tax veto.

Miller also said questions about the legal inquiries put him in a no-win position. "When you are denying, you are losing. I'm a lawyer, I know that. Are you a racist? No. Are you beating your wife? No."

He said he still has not been contacted by either federal or state investigators.

"I didn't do anything legally wrong, ethically wrong," he said. "There are those who sat on the sidelines and didn't support Kathleen [Kennedy Townsend], I did just the opposite. ... I don't regret any single thing that I did because it was completely above-board. ... We have banks of attorneys that vet every single move that we make ...

"If anything, what I did, what the basis for this is, is me raising money for Democrats. ... I've done that my entire political career. For Steny Hoyer, Harry Hughes or Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, it's what I've been about."

As for Busch getting headlines on slots, Miller said the Senate has already spoken, a sentiment echoed by other senators.

"The Senate can sit back and be self-satisfied because we know where we stand on this issue. Now it's up to the House," said freshman Sen. John A. Giannetti Jr. (D-Dist. 21) of Laurel.

Other Democratic senators and State House observers say Miller's grip on power is secure. Even senators who often disagree with Miller's conservative leadership see no momentum for change.

"People respect the ability to get things done, even though they may differ on issues," said Sen. Paul G. Pinsky (D-Dist. 22) of University Park, an unabashed liberal.

"If a president of the Senate were indicted or charges were brought, it would be a whole different ballgame," Pinsky said.

Miller's track record of listening to senators, contributing to their campaigns and making the trains run on time gives him a huge reserve of power.

But Miller also has no obvious challengers.

Three years ago, Senate Finance Chairman Thomas L. Bromwell launched a coup attempt that fizzled. Today, with an all-new leadership team, there are no Bromwells, said lobbyist and former Budget and Taxation Chairwoman Barbara A. Hoffman.

"You don't get to where Bromwell was until you've been there a while and want to try something new," she said.

"Not only are they all new to their position, they are beholden to Mike for their position," noted former delegate Cheryl C. Kagan. "I think if you were going to slay that dragon, you would want to make sure that you came well armed and it was a sneak attack. He's very smart, he has a long memory and he knows how to use the system."

There's another factor that would stand in the way of any challenge to Miller, noted lobbyist and former Sen. Laurence Levitan: Bromwell's candidacy had a chance only because Republicans joined in the effort. Given the makeup of today's Senate, any replacement for Miller would likely be more liberal and could oppose slots, the governor's top budget priority, making GOP complicity remote.

And while several senators' names have been bandied about as possible successors, Miller dwarfs every other senator with his experience and political savvy.

"There's no one who is clearly next," Kagan said.

Some of those possible successors are Senate Finance Committee Chairman Thomas McLain Middleton (D-Dist. 28) of Waldorf, a moderate and a close Miller ally; Judicial Proceedings Chairman Brian E. Frosh (D-Dist. 16) of Chevy Chase, a darling of the liberals; Budget and Taxation Chairman Ulysses Currie (D-Dist. 25) of Forestville, the Senate's top African American; and Budget and Taxation Vice Chairman Patrick J. Hogan (D-Dist. 39) of Gaithersburg, a former Republican.

"It's no accident that he's been the longest-serving president of the Senate," Frosh said. "He's good at it. I think he's going to be around for a while."

As for Miller laying low, Hoffman said, "It's summertime. There is not a lot happening."

"I don't think Mike is sidelined," Levitan said. "Mike is not a shy, retiring type of guy, and I don't think there is any question that as things work up to the session, he'll be right up front."

Staff Writer Thomas Dennison contributed to this report.